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SUBJECT Terrorism

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: The United States is tonight a nation being attacked by international terrorists who wantonly kill and who seize our innocent citizens as their prisoners.

CAROL RANDOLPH: We're continuing our discussion on terrorism and the fate of the hostages of Flight 847 with my guests, Professor Riad Ajami. He's a professor of international management at American University. Dr. Yonah Alexander, senior researcher, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University. He's also the Director of the Institute for Studies in International Terrorism at State University of New York. Mark Azonsky (?), journalist and associate editor, Worldview magazine. And John Graney, Executive Director of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. He is the retired Associate General Counsel for the CIA.

And it's a pleasure to have all of you here this morning.

Professor Ajami, let me start with you. You are a Shiite Muslim from Lebanon. And Time magazine has referred to them as being neglected and abused by the wealthy and more powerful Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims, and they have been radicalized by violence. Would you say that this assessment is correct?

RIAD AJAMI: Well, it's definitely correct. The Shias of Lebanon have been traditionally outside the main councils of power. They have been a neglected community, both economically and politically. Southern Lebanon is not as developed as the rest of Lebanon. It's a community that was kept outside for a long, long time.

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Events in the late '70s, the emergency of Iran and its revolution, and other factors in Lebanon, demographic factors, high birthrate by the Shiah community itself, awareness, education, all these factors converged together to suggest to the Shias of Lebanon that they had been outside the main councils of power and they ought to be doing something about it.

RANDOLPH: To whom do they owe their allegiance? Is it to Syria, to Iran? I mean just help us understand. Is there really one particular government that they are more responsive to, as opposed to just none at all?

AJAMI: I would say the Shias of Lebanon are a community that stands and looks unto itself, without any help from anybody else. Their allegiance is not to the Syrians, to the Iranians, or anybody else. It's a community that is discovering that it is taking its rightful place in Lebanese politics and society. And in the process, like all societies on the rise, they are discovering that all kinds of regional powers are beginning to look at them with suspicion.

So their allegiance is not to anybody else. It's a community that is looking inward. And it must survive and live in Lebanon without any connection to anybody else.

RANDOLPH: Isn't there a danger of all of us looking at the Shiite community as being as radical as the individuals who are holding the hostages? How do you feel, personally, about that?

AJAMI: Well, naturally it's easy to develop cliches and suggest the Shiah community is a radical community. The Shiah community, by and large, is not a radical community. There were some changes on the scene which suggested that they ought to exercise political power, unfortunately through the use of force. However, by and large, it's not a community that could be easily described as a community that believes in acquiring power through the use of the gun.

So, this is an incident which would have to be viewed in isolation. And the mainstream of the Shiah community itself is not looking upon this arrangement with favor.

RANDOLPH: How does it look toward the United States? How are we viewed by them?

AJAMI: Well, the Shiah community, by and large, views the United States at least favorably. A large number of Shias did migrate to the United States. Dearborn in Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, is a place where...

RANDOLPH: Where Mr. Berri's family, his former family, his wife is there. Yes.

AJAMI: His wife and his six children are there. He used to live there for a substantial period of time. Anytime he visits the United States, with the exception of the last two times he was here, he always goes to Detroit. He views Detroit as home. He's a permanent resident of the United States.

And by and large, the Shiah community in the United States have had a positive experience, in the sense that it was accepted in a community and in a society a bit more than it was accepted in its own surroundings in Lebanon.

So, one would have to say that, by and large, it's a positive experience rather than a negative experience.

RANDOLPH: And you still -- those of you who are in America, can you still maintain close contacts with those in Lebanon? Do they see you as possibly selling out, of becoming Westernized, if you will?

AJAMI: I would say the contacts are still there. The roots of a lot of American Shias are still in Lebanon. There are a great deal of back-and-forth travel. There are a great deal of linkages. And it is best exemplified by Nabih Berri, among others, in the sense that I don't think they believe that the Shias in the West did sell out, because they did not. They have adopted their new home, but they still have a great deal of interest in what goes on in Lebanon, and they're quite tied and linked to that community. And I don't see that there is a great deal of differences or radicalism with the exception of fringe groupings. And in Lebanon today, as you probably know, any five people could form a private militia and they could take any title and they could claim this or claim that.

But I would say the events suggest that there is not a great deal of support. Because when the hijackers returned back to Beirut, they had to ask and appeal for some help from others to join them. So that might suggest it is basically an act that is not totally representative of what the Shiah community would want.

RANDOLPH: I see you're shaking your head on that, Dr. Alexander.

YONAH ALEXANDER: As a footnote to what he have said, that I personally interviewed some Shiites in Lebanon who were very strongly supporters of the United States. In other words, in contradistinction to those who want to drive the United States from the Middle East, they said, basically, "Look, we were discriminated against for a long time, and we want to reassert

ourselves. And we really want to side with the United States. We really need support and assistance in order to establish ourselves, develop economically, and especially politically. And we need your [unintelligible]."

So, again, I think it would be a great mistake to lump all the Shiites in one basket.

Having said that, I think one has to look at also the strategic dimension in the region. For example, Iran has very clear strategic aims which might be different than some of the Shiites in Lebanon.

And particularly, one has to put it in the broader context. When the French ruled over Syria and Lebanon, for different interests or constellation of power, they at that time tried to provide the Christian community with the upper end. And of course the democracy, as Riad indicated, changed. And one has to see it against the backdrop of what had happened in the inter-war period as well.

RANDOLPH: Well, when you say all of this, I am left with the distinct impression that we are viewing what is happening with the hostages of Flight 847 somewhat in isolation. We are responding on a case-by-case basis. And as a result of that, maybe we'll never be prepared for something else. We're always caught off guard.

Is that what's happening?

ALEXANDER: Absolutely. I think the great mistake is to look at terrorism in isolation. And you have to put it in much broader perspective.

Today we have a very clear drama going on in Lebanon, but one for a while, at least, forgets what's happening in Central America or in Nicaragua. And this is part of the whole strategic constellation of power, meaning that it's no longer a question of men against men or missile against missile. It is low-intensity warfare that is being waged against the United States throughout the world. And those who perpetrate this specific kind of activity are clearly the Soviet Union, their proxies, such as the Cubans, as well as the wild cards of the international system, specifically Iran and Syria and Libya and others.

So I think I see it in a broader context. And unless we understand the strategic dimension of the problem, I really don't think the United States can develop the capability and strategies to deal with the problem effectively.

RANDOLPH: Mark, do you agree with this, that we are

looking at this in isolation?

MARK AZONSKY: I agree with the premise, but not with the conclusion.

I think the reason the United States has such a hard time dealing with these issues is that we have a very short collective memory in this country and we have a very hard time with cause and effect in international relations.

I would very much disagree with Dr. Alexander that this should be looked at in the larger geostrategic Soviet-American competition.

RANDOLPH: How would you look at it?

AZONSKY: I would look it as a result of the actions that have been taken by the United States and by our surrogate in the region, which has become Israel, over the last decade. I would see the result that we're witnessing today as being caused by what happened when Israel and the United States attempted to remodel Lebanon in their own vision.

It was only a few years ago that our Secretary of State was in the region making an alliance between the Phalange Maronite regime and Israel, attempting to create exactly the kind of Lebanon that the Shiites didn't want. It was only two years ago that our ships were off the coast sending 16-inch shells, 2000-pound bombs that have an accuracy, when they're accurate, of about a quarter mile, into the hills of Lebanon. It was only a few years ago that our planes were engaged in bombing. And this is not to mention the fact that many people in the region hold us responsible for what the Israelis have done, rightly or wrongly. That's probably another show.

RANDOLPH: We have to go to a break.

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RANDOLPH: We were saying earlier, Dr. Alexander and I were saying about travel, even in the United States. And I mentioned the fact that I was rather fearful of this. And he said, "In that sense, we are all hostages."

But we were looking at that clip there, and that shows us, overall, have we learned anything from Iran? And the President spoke of the fact that in Iran there was a government, there was a source of authority, which is quite different from this.

Mr. Graney, let me get you involved in this.

JOHN GRANEY: I'd like to follow up on what Mark said just before the break. And I think there's an element of cause-and-effect, but I think you really do have to go back and notice the role that the Soviets play worldwide -- to follow up on what Dr. Alexander said. If you start with Syria, you have the Soviet role there. Then you move over to Afghanistan. You come back over to Yemen. You come to Ethiopia. You go to South Africa. You come around to Angola. Then you come across to Cuba and Central America.

I think the roles that the Soviet plays behind all these scenes -- and if you notice, when one pops up, the others settle down. And I think it's an orchestration behind the scenes.

RANDOLPH: You are saying they have control of this very radical group? They can control it?

GRANEY: I wouldn't so much as say control. But I think they influence them. I think there's an element of influence.

ALEXANDER: May I, as just a footnote? I fully agree with that because I think the Middle East is a subsystem in the confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union. One has to look at this, as well. And of course there are indigenous problems.

But I would like to suggest that the Soviet Union, if they can fish in muddy water, they will do it.

And I personally know of Shiites that were recruited by the Lebanese Communist Party that were sent to the Soviet Union, were trained, sent back to South Lebanon in order to perpetrate some terrorist act.

In other words, it's not that the Soviets control, but they try to exploit a situation.

RANDOLPH: But haven't we done the same thing? Haven't we trained some terrorist groups? We have...

ALEXANDER: No. Absolutely not. I think you're making a very great mistake. They are not -- let me -- look...

AZONSKY: I'm between you two, so I feel I have to speak.

ALEXANDER: That's all right. But the point is, I cannot accept, I cannot accept those who try to equate the United States and the Soviet Union. They are two different value systems. The United States is not training terrorists. If they train, they train freedom fighters, like in Afghanistan.

In Central America, I would agree. If the Contras, which can be involved in insurgency, according to international law, but if they are engaged in terrorism, we can call them terrorists. But the United States is not engaged in training terrorists.

RANDOLPH: Let me get Mark involved.

AZONSKY: ...my two colleagues, Yonah, can't accept this kind of linkage. We all read on the front pages of our papers, we're all aware of the most recent incident. We're all aware of CIA links to the killing of 80 people in a terror bomb. Apparently, they were going after the leader of the Shiites, Fadlallah.

There's a terrible reluctance in this country -- and we might as well, you know, say it bluntly -- there's a terrible reluctance to admit the errors of our ways, the lack of knowledge that we have of the region.

And with all respect to my colleagues, I think when people start degenerating into a broader discussion of the Soviet-American role than this particular incident, it's because they don't know a lot about the regional forces and the specific things that are taking place in the region.

RANDOLPH: Let me get Professor Ajami in this.

Do you agree with that?

AJAMI: Well, I believe Mark is touching upon a point that ought to be addressed legitimately.

Yes, the Soviet Union and its surrogate states in the region will continue attempting to do all kind of nasty things. They will continue attempting to derail the peace process, will continue fishing and creating problems for the United States.

But the [unintelligible] fact, also as Mark suggested, that there is some perception on the part of people in Lebanon that the United States, whether correctly or incorrectly, have helped create a situation, which he alluded to, the...

RANDOLPH: With Israel.

AJAMI: Yes. Well, the linkage to the State of Israel. But more so to the point, the action in April, where 80 people died. And I'm sure you must have seen the banner on that building, "Made in USA," reference to the action.

UNIDENTIFIABLE: Plus "Death to America."

AJAMI: Plus "Death to America."

There was also evidence that came out later on that the United States was not totally involved, but its agents on the ground were indirectly -- the Lebanese that took it upon themselves, they were at least aided initially by the United States, but ultimately the United States pulled out of the arrangement.

That perception is [unintelligible] there, and that is the perception that is fueling the passion of these people. So we should not always argue that it is totally...

RANDOLPH: What does that all mean for those hostages who are scattered somewhere in...

GRANEY: ...back to this argument...

RANDOLPH: I don't want to just get stuck in that broader issue because I really want to deal with the hostages.

GRANEY: I think this is related directly to the hostage question, because I support the theme that Bob Woodward's story on the front page of The Post, which was not verified, which was not come up with accurate information, incensed these terrorists. If you'll notice the increase of incidents after that story broke, which blamed the U.S., which brought out this publicity and all this, that gave them the flame to get started again.

RANDOLPH: Did they need an article in the Washington Post to draw all those conclusions?

AJAMI: Well, I would say they may not have needed an article, but that article did not help. The fact that they knew that at least the secret service in Lebanon worked closely with the United States at the initial stage, they suspected that. They were not too sure. But as you probably know, there are always all kind of insinuations that whatever the Lebanese government does, whatever that shell may mean, because there is not an effective government -- but the secret service in Lebanon, if it does certain things, at that time it was going to attribute it to United States.

So they did not need an article, but there was a strong suspicion, and the article did not help.

RANDOLPH: What about -- let me go specifically to those hostages, because that's where our thoughts are, that's where our prayers are.

What do you feel, from what you know, from what all of

you know about this? Let's just say that the phone is ringing now and the Israelis are willing to release, or acquiesce to the request and they're going to release these prisoners. What then?

AJAMI: Well, if you -- if that was to happen today, one must make a distinction between the long run and the short run. If the Israelis agree today to release the...

RANDOLPH: The short run.

AJAMI: If they make the decision which they already made before -- anyway, they were going to release a large number of the detained people from the South. They were roughly going to release about 400 people, three to four hundred people. If they go ahead with that, within a reasonable time frame, within the next 48 hours, I think the tendency is likely to be to let the people go and free the ones who were captured recently. But the fate of the other seven people is still...

RANDOLPH: I want to get into that, but let me hold you on that point.

Help me understand this. If the Israelis -- and this has been asked by everybody on everybody's network, about if the Israelis were going to release these individuals anyway, is there any particular group that does not understand the courage of the Israeli soldier or the combat-readiness of the Israeli people to take on anyone? I mean why is it that they can't just go ahead and say, "We were planning to release them, and we're going to release them"?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. But I think the way you phrase the question is somewhat unrealistic, in this sense. Every nation, like every individual, they do [unintelligible] their pride. And you cannot indicate, especially when the gun is pointed at you for a very long time...

RANDOLPH: But the gun has always been pointed at them.

ALEXANDER: Yes, but it's really a question of perception. And I agree with Riad in terms of perception in Lebanon itself, and in general.

You cannot say that because there are the hostages, you can go and release them without giving the impression that you submitted, you caved in. And no nation, responsible nation, can do that.

And you can argue that, in a way, it's not an Israeli problem, because Americans are held hostage. But it is an Israeli problem. It's the problem of the Free World.

RANDOLPH: But that's my point. I mean if you talk about perception -- and I mean I'm just your average American citizen. But I think of the Israeli -- I see them as tough. I see them as no-nonsense. So if they decided to do this, I don't see it diminishing -- but I mean I am seeing this, I suppose, from my own perspective and thinking about the husbands and wives and families sitting there worried about their loved ones.

AZONSKY: Yonah is giving the case -- we have a point-counterpoint going here. He's giving the case for the Israelis being reluctant to acquiesce in...

[Confusion of voices]

AZONSKY: I think we ought to understand how the Shiites, the 766 of them, got there in the first place. They were illegally taken across the border. They were the result of an iron fist policy in which Israel used various forms -- you can call it brutality, you can call it terrorism, whatever you want to call it. But anyone who goes back and reads the newspapers earlier this year will know that the Defense Minister of Israel declared an iron fist policy, which was dedicated to the proposition that Israel had the police authority to take anyone it wanted and to do anything it wanted. And no one stopped and no one protested, except the Americans did protest when the Shiites were taken across the border, when our own State Department said an illegal act is being committed.

So two points, I think, should be made sort of to buttress the outline that you just gave. First, that they're already illegally in Israel. Secondly, that there aren't charges against most of them. Thirdly, that Israel has just released over one thousand Palestinians, some of whom, most of the world believes, were actually guilty of murder crimes. And they did that in exchange for three Israeli soldier hostages.

So the thesis that they might want to release people they were already going to release anyway for American hostages does seem to me quite reasonable.

RANDOLPH: Let's take a phone call.

[Communications difficulties]

RANDOLPH: I'll let you make your point while we're trying to the phone...

GRANEY: Your discussion and description of the Israelis, I think, is very accurate. But bear in mind that that reputation has been built by the very thing that the President was focusing on last night, that you don't negotiate and give in

to the terrorist demands, that this is the -- you negotiate, but you don't give in, you don't pay ransom. And I think the reputation of the Israelis has demonstrated that that, as hard as it may be on the victims, and nobody would sell that short, but I think that's what -- they have developed that position not to pay ransoms.

RANDOLPH: We asked the question of our viewers, if we can get the hostages out safely, whether or not the United States should retaliate. I'd like to get your views on this. We'll get the results of that poll when we come back.

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RANDOLPH: We asked this question of our viewers: If the hostages from TWA Flight 847 are safely released, should the U.S. seek retaliatory action? We received 319 phone calls. Sixty-two percent of you said yes. Thirty-six percent of you said no. And two percent were undecided.

Well, let me raise this question that the President raised, too, last night. The problem is, who do you strike? If you have no government, as you did with Iran, who do you go after?

ALEXANDER: Well, obviously, the President cannot say everything in a press conference. But...

RANDOLPH: Well, that's what he said. He...

ALEXANDER: Absolutely. But I think, again, we are looking at this particular case, but we cannot look at this case in isolation.

In a way, to respond to some of the things that have been said before, it's not because of this attack, let's say, in March. Clearly, this escalated the tension there. But one has to see it in the other context. Why was it that the American Embassy was attacked in '79 and taken over by the Iranians? And why was it that there was a series of attacks on U.S. targets in Lebanon (the Embassy twice, the Marine base) before there was the perception that the United States was involved?

The point I'm making is that unless the U.S. Government and the Free World would see terrorism for what it is -- it is an assault on democratic societies. It is a weapon, it is a tool in the broad conflict -- and unless the West would join forces, military and civilian, to deal with the problem, I think we are going to remain hostages to these blackmailers for many years to come.

RANDOLPH: Well, when you say that, you say don't look

at it in isolation, it looks as if you have pinpointed in your mind, or, you know, the possibility of pinpointing a government. But then there is the possibility of having more terrorist acts here in the United States.

Isn't that very true?

ALEXANDER: Americans already [unintelligible] terrorism because the Americans are target number one throughout the world. And why do you think you have the barricades or the walls of Jericho around the State Department and the White House and Congress? The perception is there. And in fact, you just mentioned before that Americans are afraid to fly.

So the targets are not those victims, the hostages in Lebanon today. It's the wider audience. I think the victims are those who live in democratic institutions, in order to submit to the perpetrators. And one has to...

RANDOLPH: Well, I would gather you would be in favor of some retaliatory action.

ALEXANDER: No question about it. It's a question of trying to impose a penalty, or some cost, on those who are responsible for financing, for training, and for organizing some of these activities.

RANDOLPH: All of you agree?

AJAMI: Well, basically, you have to ask the question: Is there a return address? Who do you strike? Where do you strike?

RANDOLPH: That's what I asked. Yes.

AJAMI: And so, basically, these issues are not resolved, and they're not likely to be resolved in a difficult place like Beirut. So just to...

RANDOLPH: Dr. Alexander seems to know where to go.

AJAMI: To strike in the dark would not be very useful for a country like the United States, a country with democratic principles, where we do not immediately just respond.

Yes, there ought to be a strategy and a policy of dealing with terrorism, for a country like the United States. But to go ahead and strike without knowing where are you going to strike, this is a difficult situation.

RANDOLPH: I believe Secretary Weinberger said the very

same thing, that you really do need to know specifically who...

ALEXANDER: I have to again -- I think it should be very clear. The term retaliation, I think, is the wrong term. You have to use the term self-defense. And you have a wide range of options. You have the diplomatic option, you have the economic option, and the military as the last resort.

And I agree with Riad. You cannot simply go and strike without knowing what...

RANDOLPH: An embargo? Would you consider that?

ALEXANDER: Absolutely, an economic embargo.

RANDOLPH: Would it work without having the other countries?

Mark is laughing at this.

Why are you laughing, Mark?

AZONSKY: Carol, we have a President and we have a Secretary of State. We've all seen the film clips the last few days. They all came into office talking generalities, as Yonah is now talking this afternoon, this morning. They promised us they were going to do this. They promised us we would be tough. They promised us we wouldn't take it.

And yet, when it comes down to a situation where we can't really determine who is in fact responsible, and, more importantly, where it's been proved historically that our response usually generates only a worse response -- the answer to your question of why our embassy was taken in Iran and why we have hostages, or we had hostages for a year kept in Teheran, is because of the history of American interaction with the Iranian society, beginning in the '50s and through the '60s and through the '70s.

So, I'm afraid I find it slightly irresponsible to talk about this issue in total generalities, unless Dr. Alexander...

ALEXANDER: Let me...

AZONSKY: ...unless Dr. Alexander is prepared to tell us what instruments he is going to use and who he thinks he's going to strike.

ALEXANDER: Absolutely. I'm ready to do that.

RANDOLPH: Tell us now.

ALEXANDER: First of all, we think we have to look at those wild cards in the international system, such as Libya -- let me take a very specific case -- such as Iran and such as Syria.

In the Libyan case, we find that Qaddafi promoted terrorism throughout the world. You take the British and in London, as you may recall, at the embassy, they killed -- they used the embassy as a base to kill a British policewoman. And then business was as usual.

In other words, it's double-talk. Unless you see terrorism for what it is, as a strategic threat, and then you develop the capabilities. So here is one instance.

In the case of Iran, I think Iran continued its activities and continuing its activities today, training terrorists, financing them, providing them with arms, not only in regard to Lebanon, but in regard to the Persian Gulf. We had instances there too.

And I think the international community has to decide whether they regard those countries as a respected member of the international community or as modern pirates. If they are modern pirates, I think we have the right of self-defense and we have to do whatever is necessary.

RANDOLPH: Which would include military action.

ALEXANDER: Include it as a last resort.

RANDOLPH: As a last resort.

Let's go out to the audience for a question or comment.

WOMAN: There's one comment that I'd like to make that has bothered me because I've heard no discussion about it on any program. The whole world stood still, did nothing when a hundred thousand of the Lebanese were murdered by the PLO and by Syria and other forces. And Israel decided to do something about it. It cost them not only their reputation and all the rest of it, they get no credit for cleaning out the PLO. And that's very disturbing.

What does bother me, if the President and the State Department and all the rest have no answers, what is the answer for us? And I don't expect you four gentlemen to decide it. But I notice that in the brilliant editorial, he has -- Herblock had Flight 1985, and it shows three terrorists on top of the world.

The only constructive thing I've heard so far is to keep

Greece from having our planes land there. And I think it's time.

Where are the Saudis and our friends from the oil business? Aren't they expected -- we have a Saudi prince running around. Aren't we expected to look to our friends in the Arabs to come forth and help us in this point?

RANDOLPH: What about that? Where are our friends in those countries? Have they played any major role?

AZONSKY: There's a reason there hasn't been a discussion of the woman's premise. We don't have time today. But the reason is because her facts were erroneous in the beginning.

But her larger question is more important. And I think the answer is really to be found in a general perception throughout the region that it's very difficult to come to the defense of the United States, that it's very difficult to rely on the United States. And weak Arab governments, which comprises most of them, are unwilling to put their own life on the line to support a country whose policies they have not been able to either understand or agree with.

ALEXANDER: But if the United States -- I think Mark is completely wrong, because it is the U.S. today, and its presence, that thus prevent the Soviet Union from moving into the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. And nations like Turkey or NATO, which really prevented the Soviets from painting the whole globe red. And I think this is irresponsible to indicate that because the United States had done whatever the United States had done -- and we're going back to ancient history. We cannot turn the clock back. I can make a very good case against the French, as well, and the British trying to divide nations. This is really irresponsible.

I think we are facing today a major strategic threat to the United States and the Free World. We are facing a major threat from terrorism which is being used and exploited by various nations. And unless we are going to take action, I think we are going to turn the whole world into a jungle.

RANDOLPH: We have to go to a break. I'll let you respond when we come back. I'd also like to get into the seven hostages, one of whom, I believe, has been held for about a year, over a year and a couple of months.

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(Technical difficulties)